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Saigon Maze Sets New Tests for U.S.

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Washington
Americans in war-torn South Vietnam are often seen as "those foreigners" who replaced the French.

The howling anti-American demonstrations of recent days have been no surprise to the United States officials who work hand in glove with the South Vietnamese regime.

It is not generally realized how intimate this cooperation has been.

For example, at the initiative of Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor, a South Vietnamese National Security Council was set up patterned after President Johnson's agency that deals on a day-to-day basis with the foreign policy-military situation in various parts of the world.

New U.S. Weight

This council is being described already by some observers as a "joint command" for the antiguerrilla war. This term does not apply, however, in the sense that the whole strategy and tactics of the war are "joint."

But this almost day-to-day, formalized meeting of the top Americans and South Vietnamese certainly brings the "foreigners'" weight to bear much more strongly into the government's decisions.

The council is described as "a committee of the whole."

Many observers feel that when this National Security Council is more widely publicized in Saigon and other cities it could well be picked up as a cause célèbre by the students and dissatisfied civilians who want more participation in the central government and resent the close American collaboration.

Urgency Cited

But from the Americans' point of view this chance had to be taken.

An atmosphere of gloomy stalemate has pervaded the American command structure for weeks, and it is hoped this almost daily continuing discussion of the war's problems in the council will help to educate the South Vietnamese Government in "how to win a war."

After talking in Saigon with responsible Americans and acute observers of the Khanh government and the war effort, the recent pessimistic appraisal of the Vietnam situation by an official of the Central Intelligence Agency is hardly shocking.

Such pessimism must often be discussed where major American decisions are being made, even if American officials

remain stoical about the fragile condition in South Vietnam and do not mention "defeat" or "negotiation."

But after listening to its surprisingly frank analyses of its mountainous problems with the Khanh regime, the CIA conclusions by Willard Matthias about "a prolonged stalemate" and the possibility of "some kind of negotiated settlement" can, at least, be fully understood.

Every week finds more Americans arriving in Saigon—experts on psychological warfare, economics and finance (the banking system is antiquated and tottering), foreign relations, public administration and others.

Most seem to agree that more Americans are needed at the district and provincial level, too, and soon.

Someone has called this American presence the "shadow government."